



FrontLineSupervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eap.html>

■ Recently a long-term employee of my unit died of cancer. We had all known he was ill, but it had more of an impact than I would have thought. The EAP did critical incident work with us, but I am concerned there may still be some impact. What more can I do?

The death of an employee in your organization can have long term effects. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps in many aspects of critical incident management through support of both leadership and coworkers who may rarely have to face this type of issue. Individuals are impacted differently for a number of reasons. People have unique things going on in our own lives that affect how they respond. Individual experiences with grief and loss, including recent or past losses will influence how they respond and how severely they may be impacted. Current stressors can build from home, work, finances, illness, family issues and more. All these affect how people deal with tragedy. If you have an employee who appears to be more impacted than others or if one of your people comes to you looking for help, do refer directly to the EAP. Help is available for what may be a normal response but outside the person's normal coping abilities.

■ We terminated an employee for poor performance, after he told his coworkers he had worked with the EAP. I'm concerned that others may fear that their jobs will be jeopardized if I refer them to the EAP. How can I convince them that the termination was unrelated to the EAP visit?

Policies that establish EAPs always include the provision that participation cannot cause an employee's job security or promotional opportunities to be threatened. Both the policy and the organizational culture must make it clear to employees that getting help is a positive and useful step to management supports. Undoubtedly, employees see the vast majority of people who use the EAP remain in their jobs without incident. Still, it is important to remind employees of the EAP policy to allay fears and false associations like the one you describe. Fear about whether an EAP is truly confidential or safe is normal, but it can sabotage a program's utilization if no promotional strategy exists to counter it. Although you cannot discuss confidential information, remind employees that using the EAP is considered a positive thing, not a negative one. When everyone understands your organization's grounds for termination--unacceptable performance despite repeated written and oral warnings--then they will see that the EAP can only help, not hurt.

■ My employee returned after a supervisor referral and stated, "Yeah, I went to the EAP, and now they know the whole story, not just

It is not unusual for employees to visit the EAP and vent their frustrations about supervisors in a confidential setting. Do not be concerned. This is a step that will facilitate a helping relationship between the EAP and the employee. EA professionals regularly anticipate that employees will impart their side of the story, but the focus of the EAP interview will be on correcting performance issues, identifying personal problems, and making

■ **your side." I am a bit concerned about whether the EAP heard a bunch of distortions and what they may think.**

recommendations about areas over which the employee has control. Reports of your personality issues and supervision practices are not the focus of change in an EAP interview with your employee. Sharing as much information as possible about job performance issues of your employee with the EAP prior to a supervisor referral will assist the EA professional in putting such reports in perspective. The EAP can then prompt employees to examine their feelings and take steps toward change.

■ **One of my employees has benefited greatly from the EAP. If she gives me permission to cite her as an example of how it can help, can I direct other workers to her who want to learn more about the EAP?**

Regardless of whether or not she gives permission, it's a bad idea to refer other workers to her to discuss the EAP. This creates a dangerous precedent; employees should never be placed in a position of providing testimony about their EAP experiences. For starters, this would reduce the anonymity EAP provides clients. It might also taint others' perceptions of how the EAP works. Moreover, your employee may be subtly pressured by peers to reveal sensitive information she may later regret divulging. If employees want to learn more about the EAP, direct them to promotional venues such as brochures or to a Web site. If you've had a positive personal experience with the EAP, you may feel comfortable sharing your experience and that might be helpful.

■ **I am not sure that I am cut out to supervise people. I hesitate to confront my employees, and I dread meeting with them in a group. Sometimes I delegate supervision to others, and I avoid meeting with complainers. Should I look for another job or use the EAP to help me?**

Before you conclude you're not equipped to manage people, discuss your concerns with an EA professional. Each of the issues you've mentioned is a common challenge supervisors face. Many supervisors dislike confrontation and take pains to avoid it. You may never learn to enjoy it, but you can develop strategies to communicate clearly and diplomatically in potentially adversarial situations. Dreading team meetings may stem from shyness, discomfort with group dynamics, or other factors. The EAP can help you develop strategies to assert yourself in groups and become more comfortable leading discussions and giving presentations. Delegation is actually a learned skill. Effective supervisors usually learn that in order to gain power, they have to give some of it up. So the fact that you allow others to step into your role may actually work to your advantage, as long as you remain accountable for the results.

NOTES